English(es) for Indonesians: A Review on Literatures

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Abstract

This paper investigates which English(es) should be learned by Indonesians, as the language has uncontrollably spread into the country. Divided into several sections - English in Indonesia Across Time, English' Role for Indonesians, Inquiring English and National Identity, and The English Language(s) for Indonesians, and Final Remarks, this paper explores facts and realities of English existence in Indonesia. In order to provide a meaningful outcome, this paper concludes with some alternative thoughts of possible English(es) to be learned. Indeed, instead of leading to a "one-size-fits-all" solution for English learning in Indonesia, it is considered to be more sensible to leave the readers with more insights for further discussions.

Keywords:
English, Learning, Indonesia

English learning is not as simple of a matter as it used to be. It is no longer a one-way imposition of the more powerful English speaking people to the disadvantaged non-English speakers. The aim of learning has shifted from merely mastering a foreign or second language to gaining global access, advancing knowledge, and possessing a global identity. This also applies to English learners in Indonesia.

1. English in Indonesia across Time

Indonesia, located along the equator, has declared Indonesian as the country's sole national and official language since 1928 as pledged by the youth nationalists. Having approximately 35 ethnic groups and 725 languages and dialects (Library of Congress, December 2004, p. 6) of which 500 are mutually unintelligible

(Dardjowidjojo, 2000, p. 22), Indonesian was chosen to unite diverse ethnics around the country. This resulted in a strong bound between the people and Indonesian, making the language a major part of the people's identity (Crystal, 2003, p. xii).

Besides the national language, English also exists in Indonesia, the fourth most populated country with the largest Muslim community in the world (Library of Congress, December 2004, pp. 6-7). English has been the main foreign language in this country, yet it has never become an official or national language. The English(es) that Indonesians refer to, as developing countries have commonly done, are British and American Englishes.

Looking back at the world history, English spread along with the spread of British colonisation across North America and Asia (Alip, 2004, p. 1). In Indonesian context, however, English was introduced by another European ruler, the Dutch. In the 16th century, there were two iconic conflict events between the Dutch and the British - the Dutch destroying English factory in Jakarta and the Amboina Massacre where the Dutch killed eighteen English men (Smith, 1991, p. 39). As a result, neither Dutch nor English was used as a lingua franca, rather Malay and Portuguese were used for communication among expatriates and local people. Malay then developed further, supplemented with a list of vocabulary composed by Cornelis de Houtman (a Dutch captain). This list of vocabulary was then translated into Latin and English (Smith, 1991, p. 39).

During the 350 years Dutch colonisation era, English was one of the language subjects offered at Dutch-speaking schools besides French (Smith, 1991, p. 40). The dominance of English teaching in Indonesia "can only be traced from early 1900s when there was a move to abolish French as a subject in the *Europesche Lagereschool* (European primary schools) and to replace it with English" (Groeneboer, 1998). At the end of the Dutch invasion, its language was not adopted and welcome in Indonesia, rather "English remained in Indonesia as the first foreign language" (Alip, 2004, p. 2). During the Japanese occupation in 1942-1945, more caution was given to foreign language(s) by prohibiting "all European foreign languages" (Smith, 1991, p. 40). Both the teachings of Dutch and English were banned (Groeneboer, 1998; Thomas, 1968, p. 279).

After Indonesian independence, English was "chosen" to be the main foreign language by Indonesian government through its decree in 1945 (Dardjowidjojo, 2000, p. 23; Smith, 1991, p. 40; Yuwono, 2005, p. 4). For Indonesia to deal with international communication, the language used "eventually fell on English, not Dutch, despite the fact the decision makers at that time had been educated in Dutch language schools" (Huda, 1999 in Mistar, 2005, p. 76). Even though Dutch had existed in Indonesia for some three and a half centuries, English was chosen because Dutch was believed to be "the language of the enemy"(Thomas, 1968, p. 281) and would trace back to the past colonialism in Indonesia (Dardjowidjojo, 2000, p. 23; Smith, 1991, p. 40). However, the abandonment of Dutch and support for English as the main foreign language in Indonesia was more because the Dutch language was not so international. Since then, Dutch has mostly been learned only "to understand old colonial documents, which are written in Dutch" (Alip, 2004, p. 6).

In brief, English has since been taught at schools, with the support from foreign institutions such as the Ford Foundation from the U.S. and London and Leeds Universities from the U.K. (Smith, 1991, p. 40), to name a few. The aim of English Language Teaching (ELT) starting at secondary level of education is, according to the Ministry of Education, for social justice and prosperity through enrichment of "human and economic resources" (Smith, 1991, p. 40).

In reality, it does not automatically turn English teaching and English spread in Indonesia as unproblematic. The changes of governmental system from centralised to decentralised does not guarantee improvements in English teaching, with continuous changes in curriculum as its main problem (Yuwono, 2005, p. 4). From its independence in 1945 to 1996, there have been five English curricula implemented in Indonesia, starting from Grammar-translation Approach by 1945, Oral Approach by 1968, Audio-lingual Approach by 1975, Communicative Approach by 1984, to further Communicative Approach by 1994 (Dardjowidjojo, 2000, p. 26). Unfortunately, the function of English as a communication tool has not been the main focus, which results in less successful English teaching outcome (Widiyanto, 2005, p. 111). As shown by Smith, secondary schools conduct two to four hour English teaching sessions per week, with the result of

"less than 800 words" vocabulary mastery (Smith, 1991, p. 41). As a result, there are outrageous numbers of non-formal English language courses outside school especially in large cities, which promise is for students to achieve English mastery. This clearly shows that there is a view of English need in Indonesia.

Across time however, the government does not always support English teaching and spread in Indonesia. In the 1970s, the government banned advertisements on televisions, especially those delivered in English. Signs and announcements, including shop billboards, were also forbidden to be written in English. Such advertisements, signs, and announcements were stated by the government as a "cultural pollution" (Smith, 1991, p. 41).

Nevertheless, the spread of English through movies, magazines, and books has been uncontrollable. American and British Englishes have been the "principal" dialect of English and a dialect with a "considerable status" (Smith, 1991, p. 41), subsequently. This is because of the materials availability and the teachers' use of English (Dardjowidjojo, 2000, p. 27). Changes slightly happen at the current time, where "non-native sounding English" (Dardjowidjojo, 2000, p. 27) is more tolerated, along with learners' target on fluency. Lowenberg even believes that English in Indonesia is an "additional" (Lowenberg, 1991, p. 136) language, as it is incorporated into the Indonesian language. The adoption and adaptation of English words into Indonesian is frequently functioned as a means of putting forward a 'distinctive Indonesian identity'. Quite often English is stated as language of "modern knowledge and technology" for the sake of "national development", whereas Indonesian is in its role as "the language of education, the media, and national unity" (Smith, 1991, p. 43)

Indeed, globalisation has made a significant increase of English prominence in Indonesia. Yuwono confirmed this premise by suggesting that globalisation has increased the importance of English in the school system (2005, p. 15). There are still problems to be solved – large classes in teaching English, insufficient teachers' mastery of English, and teachers' low salary, unfamiliarity with curriculum, and most of all "cultural barrier" in shifting teachers' role from "masters" into "facilitators" (Dardjowidjojo, 2000, p. 28). It is not easy to shift teachers' role as a model for students to a facilitator. Teacher, or "*guru*" in

Indonesian, stands for *Sing diguGU lan ditiRU*", which means a role model for imitation, including in social life (Widiyanto, 2005, p. 107). Changing them into facilitators means more than just shifting their roles in the classrooms rather it involves changing their status in the society.

Furthermore, negative responses towards English are also received from some intellectuals, including some linguists of the Indonesian language. Asim Gunarwan (1993, pp. 659-675) for example, forwarded a paper entitled "*Bahasa Asing Sebagai Kendala Pembinaan Bahasa Indonesia*" (translated as Foreign Language as a Constraint towards Indonesian Language Enrichment) at the Indonesian Language Congress. He believed that even though Indonesia is the largest Muslim society in the world, foreign languages like Arabic, Chinese, Japanese, French and German, are not threatening the Indonesian language. It is English that is the most constraining foreign language in the Indonesian language learning in Indonesia. This, as he suggested, includes retardation of the quality of, attitude towards, and passion towards the Indonesian language (1993, pp. 664, 669). A stronger claim was also made in the same article, as he asserted that "*BIng dapat menghalangi pembinaan sikap dan rasa cinta kepada BI*" (1993, p. 666), which can be translated as English impedes the development of attitude and passion towards Indonesian. Gunarwan also stated that English has made Indonesian people "*keinggris-inggrisan atau keamerika-amerikaan*", which can be translated as being like the British or American (Gunarwan, 1993, p. 670). His article clearly exhibits an anxious feeling of Indonesian people experiencing national identity wear off. This obviously suggests his unawareness of the current role of English as an International Language (EIL). His concern for Indonesians becoming too British or American due to the use of English clearly suggests that he was not aware of the local values and varieties of English(es), a concept believed in the EIL paradigm.

2. English' Role for Indonesians

Looking at a glance at the above historical facts, it seems fair to say that the current English existence in Indonesia is not some sort of a linguistic imperialism, as the language is learned without the aim of eliminating local languages. According to Alip (2004, p. 3) "learning a new language at the expense of one's native language because of a certain inferiority feeling is as colonialistic as forcing the local people to learn the language of the authority". This is certainly not the case of Indonesians learning English today.

In talking about Indonesians' motivation in learning English, Alip (2004, pp. 2-3) claimed that "an instrumental argument" is out of question due to limited possibilities of Indonesian people contact with English language in daily practice. This is not true however, as job markets available for Indonesians have become global and borderless across nations. Consequently, this results in tremendous changes of Indonesians targeting international career positions. Furthermore, there is also a trend of integrative motivation, where Indonesians tend to "study a foreign language because they want to be part of the target culture" (Alip, 2004, p. 3). In reality, as English has become an international language, the aimed "target culture" has shifted from so-called native speakers' culture(s) to international culture(s).

Apart from the above "outward from the country" motivation of English learning, English is still far from being one of the languages for Indonesian internal communication. This is because the language is only intelligible for a limited proportion of the population. As suggested by Guibernau (2007, p. 13), "communication requires the use of a specific language known by the members of the nation". At the time being, English is mostly viewed as "an instrument of modernization, economic progress and social, educational and occupational success" (Tan & Rubdy, 2008, p. 5). The Indonesian language, on the other hand, is more for "social solidarity" as only very minimum of Indonesians currently master English. Unlike Tan and Rubdy's assertion, however, the Indonesian language does not incorporate "a repository of cultural identity" (Tan & Rubdy, 2008, p. 5), as the tradition and indigenous cultures of Indonesians are rooted in local instead of national languages.

3. Inquiring English and National Identity

The "compartments" in the minds of Indonesians – local languages as the language of traditions, Indonesian as the language for solidarity, and English as the language for modernisation, is a manifestation of Indonesian people's identity. According to Guibernau (2007, p. 10), identity is "a definition, an interpretation of the self that establishes what and where the person is in both social and psychological terms", which he stated as emerges "within a system of social relations and representations".

Simply put, identity is about 'who we are and who we are not' in the society. This is confirmed by Guibernau's assertion that "the defining criteria of identity are continuity over time and differentiation from others – both fundamental elements of national identity" (2007, p. 10). Furthermore, he claims that experiences across time provide nation members with a "common meaning" which leads to certain sense of identity that "only 'insiders' can grasp" where there is "a collective sentiment based upon the belief of belonging to the same nation and of sharing most of the attributes that make it distinct from other nations" (Guibernau, 2007, p. 11).

Indeed, national identity is not a simple set of unified nation members pledging as one, rather it is a complex agreement that involves both rational and beyond rational elements and dimensions of the nation members. In details, Guibernau conceptualises national identity as having five dimensions – psychological, cultural, territorial, historical and political (2007, pp. 11-25). In the psychological dimension, "the strength of emotions overrides reason, because it is through a sentimental identification with the nation that individuals transcend their finite and, at least for some, meaningless lives" (Guibernau, 2007, p. 12). In terms of cultural dimension, "values, beliefs, customs, conventions, habits, languages and practices are transmitted to the new members who receive the culture of a particular nation" (Guibernau, 2007, p. 13). Moreover, Guibernau (2007, p. 13) concludes that "a shared culture favours the creation of solidarity bonds among the members of a given community by allowing them to recognize each other as fellow nationals and to imagine their community as separate and distinct from others" and "individuals socialized within a distinct culture tend to

internalize its symbols, values, beliefs and customs as forming a part of themselves". In Indonesia, it is the territorial dimension that requests a further answer in the current era, as territories are fading away and countries have become borderless.

Even though the Indonesian language is not so much of a "repository of cultural identity" (Tan & Rubdy, 2008, p. 5), it has certainly occupied a deep meaning in the identity of Indonesians, as it separates and makes them different to people of other countries. However, such a thought needs to be in consistence with the English as an International Language (EIL) or World Englishes (WE) paradigm itself. There should be more lenient definitions of culture and identity, as it has frequently bound cultures and identities into those of nation states. EIL or WE should consistently incorporate a larger extent of understandings and meanings of identities, as flexible as it has tried to accommodate convergence and divergence of the English language across the globe.

It can be argued that in the current world, English has the competence of providing Indonesian speakers of English with a 'distinctive Indonesian identity', a particularly identity which is different from ordinary representations of the Indonesian language for national identity and English for international communication. The contestation between the Indonesian and English languages within Indonesian English users, or perhaps also with local languages for those who speak them as well, can only be overcome through continuous negotiations between the languages. Mastering a local language or Indonesian only, is not sufficient to gain the 'distinctive Indonesian identity' as mentioned above. In other words, the concept of identity should not be bound rigidly as national identity per se rather it should be given some room to develop further, in order to provide sufficient support for prospective further understandings of identity as an impact of divergence and convergence uses of languages. This is true, especially in the current English as an International Language (EIL) paradigm. All in all, this leads back to the never ending questions of the dynamic understanding of EIL, while its investigation is done sometimes without departing from the ever changing concept of EIL.

4. The English Language(s) for Indonesians

Looking at each of the two languages' position in the international arena, the idea of internationalising the Indonesian language is currently out of reach. This is because the use of any language in the international arena is currently determined by economic reason. Clearly, the Indonesian language has not been able to provide such power sufficiently. As Tan and Rubdy suggested (2008, p. 4), "value profiles of languages and language varieties often reflect how they are positioned in global as well as local markets". In terms of English, the concept of "hybrid" pragmatic of World Englishes proposed by Nihalani (2010, p. 42) seems to be the most compatible to Indonesian context. Nihalani suggested that there are negotiations of language practices – "'divergence' at the segmental level and 'convergence' in some ways, at the supra-segmental level and shall serve to harmonize the two seemingly opposing tendencies of 'national identity' on the one hand, and 'international intelligibility' on the other" (2010, p. 42). In other words, there are variations in the English to be learned and used by Indonesians. Indeed, the English will be a hybrid one, which will take part as one of the diverse English(es) in the world.

The next question is then Indonesians' readiness for their own diverse English or Englishes. In principle, Indonesians are emotionally ready for accommodating new varieties of English. Its people are accustomed to the "unity in diversity" and "the spirit of tolerance" (Nihalani, 2010, p. 42) in almost all of their life aspects, not just language. Indonesians are very much used to diversity, as shown in the national slogan "Bhinneka Tunggal Ika", a Sanskrit phrase which meaning is unity in diversity. This is also in line with Chew's idea of "from chaos to order" language change, where heterogeneous community is believed to create a situation "in the direction of increasing complexity and integration of more and more diverse elements" (Chew, 2010, p. 49).

One constraint still exists in Indonesia, however, where there has long been a strong belief of British and/or American varieties as the "correct" English. The situation is a proof of Tan and Rubdy's claim that "negative attitudes towards varieties of English that do not conform Standard English norms (usually British or American) in the Inner Circle are easily transferred to countries in the

peripheries, as evidenced by the Singlish-Good English debate in Singapore" (Tan & Rubdy, 2008, p. 7). Certainly, this constraint cannot be taken for granted to be fading away without any further steps taken by the Indonesian people themselves.

After reviewing the linguistic and social facts of the English and Indonesian languages within the country as mentioned in the previous sections, it is not a simple matter to decide which English or Englishes to be taught to Indonesians in Indonesia. Kirkpatrick's idea that Indonesia would likely choose neighbouring countries' Englishes namely Singaporean and/or Malaysian Englishes as its "model of choice" (Kirkpatrick, 2006, p. 77) is most possibly not applicable. Regardless of linguistic similarities between Indonesian and Malay, "cultural similarities" between Indonesia and Malaysia, collaboration between the two countries in ASEAN, and Indonesian people's purpose of learning English to "communicate with fellow non-native speakers within ASEAN and the region" (Kirkpatrick, 2006, p. 77), Indonesia would be unlikely to implement the teaching of Malaysian English. This is due to emphasis on political reason and national pride, as the two countries are in both intimate and competitive relationships. This actually is in conformity to Kirkpatrick's own claim that "reasons" and "relative availability" (Kirkpatrick, 2006, p. 78) are the considerations in choosing a model, with political reason playing the significant role in the context of Indonesia.

The unclear possible solution is even worsened by current condition of English teaching in Indonesia. A study by Rusli explored the current changes happening to English in Indonesia as its role has shifted to be "a new tool of communication in line with the globalization" (2004, p. 233). She explicitly concluded that English teaching in Indonesia "should be revised to adjust to the need of the society nowadays" by restructuring the curriculum, providing technological facilities such as computers and the Internet, and providing more self-development opportunities for English educators (Rusli, 2004, p. 240). Unfortunately, however, her data collection instrument was still based on the "native non-native" paradigm, as can be seen from her Likert-scale questionnaire findings – "be able to communicate with native speakers orally as well as in written form" (Rusli, 2004, pp. 238-239).

Clearly, the question of which English(es) are suitable for Indonesians to learn are not easy to answer. It is important to bear in mind that "no language has an inherent superiority or inferiority to others. If a language lacks modern vocabulary, such situation is possibly not due to the language itself but because the culture where the language is spoken does not need such vocabulary" (Alip, 2004, p. 5). Thus, what Indonesians need is English(es) that is/are able to facilitate the main aim – communicating and developing career globally on one hand, but is/are maintaining the national identity on the other hand.

To begin with, Indonesians need to put themselves forward and be confident as of equal level with English speakers from other countries. It does not necessarily mean that they have to look up to either British or American English in communication as suggested by Alip (2007, p. 167). Rather, Indonesians need to clearly exhibit who they are, or in other words show their identity, in communicating in English internationally. A good example of such a figure is Professor Tommy Koh, a Singapore's Ambassador, who put himself as an example of a diverse English speaker being proud of his identity by asserting, "I should hope that when I'm speaking abroad my countrymen will have no problem recognizing that I am a Singaporean" (Tongue, 1974 in Nihalani, 2010, p. 40).

5. Final Remarks

In brief, it should all return to the purpose of learning English of individual Indonesians, whether it is for global communication, expanding knowledge, gaining a 'distinctive Indonesian identity', or all of them. As the above explanation suggest, English learning in Indonesia aims for multi purposes, yet retaining their national identity. Consequently, this does not limit the learning to the so-called Standard English vis-à-vis British and/or American English.

As stated in the abstract, this paper aims to provide insights of whether changes in English existence have actually happened in this 250 million people country, and consequently what sort of English(es) need to be learned by Indonesians. Instead of leading to a "one-size-fits-all" solution of English learning in Indonesia, readers are left with the above insights for further discussions.

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